

FATAL REQUEST FOUND OUT

By A. L. Harris Author of "Mine Own Familiar Friend," etc.
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CHAPTER II—Continued.

Mr. Burritt's face became flushed, and he started to his feet with the haste and hot indignation which would have done credit to one of half his years. "James!" he cried, with passion, "is this the way you treat your old friend? Does the fidelity of half a life time count for nothing? Why, even your name has been preserved in inviolable secrecy, and at this very moment not one single soul, besides myself, is aware of the object of my journey, or of the identity of the individual I have come to meet!—and this is all you have to say to me! I had better return home at once, without more delay!"

He was evidently much moved, and the other man could not but recognize that the emotion he betrayed was genuine. So he, too, rose from his seat and, catching Mr. Burritt by the arm, said, "My dear fellow, don't misunderstand me! Surely you did not take me seriously just now. It is not that I doubted you for a moment, Silas; but—" He passed his hand over his eyes, as though to clear away something which obstructed his vision. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he continued: "I only landed in the old country this morning, and it has brought it all back again—all the shame and sorrow, all the suffering and remorse—it seems as fresh as though—as though it had all happened yesterday, instead of twenty years ago. I cannot but realize the fact that, in spite of all my wealth—honestly earned, too, every penny of it, I swear—I am a pariah, an outcast. No, don't interrupt me. I tell you—with a bitter, mirthless laugh—"I feel more like a returned convict than anything else."

"James!" exclaimed Mr. Burritt, "you shock me! you grieve me more than I can say! I—"

His friend interrupted him. "You!"

excitement caused by the meeting with the old friend he had not seen for so many years. At any rate, whatever the cause, there was no doubt as to the effect; for he found it impossible to sleep, or to do anything but toss from side to side, as hour after hour wearily wore itself away. By some peculiar action of the brain, he also found himself compelled to review all the past scenes of his life, and mentally, step by step, retrace the path he had trodden during those fifty years or so, which went to make up the sum of his existence on this planet.

At last, in despair, he rose, and going to the window, looked out upon the night. It was a very moonlight night—too much so, in fact. There was something almost weird and ghastly in its effect. So he dropped the blind with a crash, and went back to bed again, hoping that, this time, he might be able to sleep.

But it was the same thing over again. Only this time his thoughts concentrated themselves upon his family and his home life. He remembered, with a sense of remorse, that he had been a little—only a little—irritable at breakfast that morning, and that he had spoken rather sharply when interrogated as to the purpose of his sudden expedition.

Certain of his friend's sayings had grated upon his ear, and caused a chill feeling of dissatisfaction and regret. "Thank God!" he had said when he heard of the deaths of those others, cut off, more than one of them, before they had attained their proper span.

Mr. Burritt turned uneasily in his bed as he reflected upon this, and remembered that he was the only one left who knew all. The only one his friend had to fear. To fear! Surely that was not the right way to put it?

As felt himself falling—falling from an immeasurable height—and woke. "What a hideous dream," he thought. "How weird—how awful—how real! I would rather lie awake the whole night through than dream just such another. I wonder what the time is!"

He felt for his watch and the matches, and struck a light. Just half past three—no more. As he restored the articles again to their places, he thought he heard faint sounds of movement in the next room.

"Evidently I am not the only restless person," he said to himself as he lay down again. "I have a companion in misfortune. To-morrow morning we shall be able to compare experiences. Suppose I were to knock at the wall and speak to him? But then I might disturb someone else and alarm them. I, at would never do. I expect it must have been the cucumber that gave me the nightmare. I hope I shan't have another such dream; if I do, I'll never touch cucumber any more as long as I live." His eyes closed, and in a few moments he deep and regular breathing showed that he had again fallen asleep.

And again he dreamt, and the dream was as follows:

He was lying in his bed, or at least so he thought, and after a while, it seemed to him that it became very hard and narrow, so that he had no room to move in it. It was also very dark. He tried to turn over upon his side, but found, as in the other dream, that he could stir neither hand nor foot. And what appeared to him a long time, he began to hear sounds over his head. Sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, and at the same time he began to experience a difficulty in breathing. And still the sound went on—the sound of some one hammering—of some one hammering nails—

The sound of some one hammering nails into a coffin!

And with that, all at once, the awful truth broke upon him. He was dead, and they were nailing him up in his coffin—dead!

His heart stopped beating as he grasped the full horror of the situation.

They were burying him alive! Oh, horrible!—horrible!

In vain he tried to burst the bonds of the immensity in which he was held. In vain he made frenzied efforts to cry aloud. The most frantic endeavors were unavailing. He was unable to utter a sound or produce the smallest movement. Then it seemed as though some one were trying to raise the lid of the coffin. There was a faint, creaking sound—a faint glimmer of light was perceptible overhead. It increased and widened! Oh, joy! He was saved—saved! The coffin-lid was raised little by little—higher and higher—in another moment he should be free!

It was done. He saw a face bending over him—a familiar face—the face of an old friend. Already he had called him in his heart as his benefactor, his deliverer. Then—what were those words he heard? Words he had heard before—when was it?

"You can ruin me whenever you please, but now you are in my power!"

The lid was clapped down again, leaving him in utter darkness. The hammering began again. He made one last tremendous effort and woke. Woke to find himself sitting bolt upright, with the perspiration streaming from him. Woke to find the man, whose voice even now seemed to ring in his ears as he bent over the open coffin, standing beside his bed, in the faint, grey light of morning.

"What brings you here?" gasped Mr. Burritt, as soon as he had realized the fact that the terrible ordeal he had just passed through was only a dream.

"I couldn't sleep," was the response, "and I couldn't lie still any longer, so I came to see whether you were awake."

(To be continued.)

A Chess Village.

Near the Prussian town of Magdeburg lies the little village of Strobeck, which has earned for itself an interesting celebrity. The village contains 1,200 inhabitants, who are one and all chess players. They may be said to learn the game in their cradles, for among the first lessons taught to a child by its parents are the moves in chess and the first playthings it receives are chessmen. The smallest children are to be seen in their playtime sitting quietly together with a chessboard before them gravely considering the moves and in the evening the old people meet to play their favorite game. At stated times in the year there are chess tournaments in which both the grown-up people and the children take part, prizes being given to the victors. Many people come to Strobeck during these competitions to watch the peasants at their games. The children even receive instruction in chess in the schools.

A Collection of Pens.

The Carnavalet Museum in Paris contains a collection of pens which, while interesting from a connoisseur's point of view as works of art, are no less attractive to the historian.

Every time a sovereign visits the town hall in Paris he is begged to sign his name in the visitors' book, and for this purpose a richly ornamented pen is handed the royal visitor.

For the intended visit of the king of Italy the city of Paris has ordered a special pen of the Italian silversmith Froment-Mourice. The design is in XVI. century style and is in exquisite taste. The penholder is ornamented with a little enamel cartridge bearing the arms of the House of Savoy.

BY WHOSE HAND?

By EDITH SESSIONS TUPPER.

Author of "By a Hair's Breadth," "The Black Diamond," etc.

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CHAPTER X.—Continued.

Yes; there was the announcement, in flaunting capitals, that the world-renowned—the only Rama Bojanta—the famous Hindoo Snake-charmer, would, as usual, appear that evening. After I had breakfasted, I went out to find some friends, and on my way called at the box office of the theater where Bojanta was performing, and bought a couple of tickets for that evening.

Then I sought the office of Basil Fortune, a well-known lawyer, who was a classmate of mine, and a prince of good fellows.

He was surprised and delighted to see me. We spent the day together and decided that, after dining, we would look in on the world-famous—the only Bojanta.

CHAPTER XI.

It was with quickened pulse and beating heart that I watched the preparations on the stage that evening for the appearance of the woman who I believed was the murderess of Reginald Dalrymple.

Two attendants brought in a large box which they handled with gingerly care. Two others followed with a second.

There was an intense silence through the house, which was broken by loud plaudits, as a tall, slender woman in black tights, with an orange sash twisted about the hips, came hurrying on.

I leaned forward and anxiously scanned her face and form. She answered perfectly to the description both of Converse and the professor, being dark, supple, and almost as slender as one of her serpents.

She bowed with perfect grace, and then quickly opened one of the boxes and drew out an anaconda, which she wrapped about herself. Next she brought forth a python, which she stroked and caressed and coiled about her arm. More and more she took

fair English, interlarded with Spanish oaths and stage slang.

She was crafty, coarse and sensual. Her mouth, her eyes, her attitude, bespoke the wanton. Though she addressed her conversation chiefly to Hamilton and Fortune, I was perfectly aware she was constantly regarding me with furtive glances.

The boxes containing her serpents were in the room, and, rising, she put back the soft blankets and fur robes which wrapped her pets, and drew out a box-constrictor, which she extravagantly fondled and caressed for our benefit.

As she coiled it about her lithe form, a faultlessly attired young man entered the room. He was greeted by my companions and presented to me as Mr. Osgood. Remembering his relationship to Bojanta, with some curiosity I watched him as he approached and spoke to his mistress. She gave him a smile of indulgent contempt, and endeavored to throw a coil of her serpent about his neck.

He beat a hasty retreat, and she, laughing immoderately, then restored the snake to its place in the box.

"The coupe is here, Rama," called her protector, from the doorway, "won't you and your friends come home and have supper with us?" this to Hamilton.

"Yes, yes," cried Bojanta, "come and sup with us. There will be four of us—that is right. I have some delicious salad and partridges waiting, and Van can make an enchanting punch. Then, too, you shall see my beloved, my beauty, my inferna, my cobra!"

"You cobra! Have you one?" I asked.

"Yes, it's too precious to show to the vulgar herd. It is only the select few that are permitted to gaze upon it. Come, then, and see it."

I wanted to go; I might not have another such opportunity. I could see that Fortune did not care to ac-



A revolting and fascinating spectacle.

cept this invitation, but at last he yielded and we all left the theater together.

Her coupe was waiting at the door. As she stood on the steps, buttoning her long gloves, "Let me see," she said. "Van, you must show these gentlemen the way. I shall take one with me. Now which will be the favored one?" "You," she said softly, laying her hand upon my arm.

"I don't know," I answered. "I never cared to."

"She has set this city quite agog. Not only by her proficiency in handling these snakes, but by her dresses, her jewels, and her intrigues. The latest delicious bit is that Van Osgood, one of our jennese dorees has furnished superb apartments for her, and there are rumors of midnight suppers which are decidedly racy."

Rama Bojanta was unmistakably the feature of the evening, and her act was over there was nothing of any interest to witness.

We according made our way into the lobby where Fortune greeted a young man who was standing there.

He presented his acquaintance as Mr. Hamilton, a representative of one of the leading San Francisco dailies.

"How did you like the snake act?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"Clever, but crawly," was Fortune's terse reply.

"Come in behind with me," said Hamilton. "I'm going to interview Bojanta."

Fortune hesitated a little but I at once accepted. The way seemed opening fast for my investigations.

Through a dark alley we hastened to the stage door which swung open for us at a word or two from Hamilton. We picked our way over trapdoors and through stage debris of all sorts. A card was sent to the snake-charmer and a speedy answer obtained. Yes, Bojanta would see us.

As we entered her dressing-room she turned from her mirror to greet us. She had exchanged her stage dress for a long, sweeping robe of black, dashed here and there with her favorite yellow. Her piercing eyes smiled a welcome, and, lighting a cigarette, she had us be seated.

During the interview that ensued I studied this woman, who was destined to solve the mystery surrounding Dalrymple's death. She spoke very

she murmured, "in honor of the wish of your new acquaintances, you, my darling, shall have a treat."

Going to the mantle, near by, she took down a jar and opened it. I instantly recognized the contents as she poured them into the palm of her hand. The bits of roots were exactly like those which Boileau had shown me in his room.

"Is that the arrac root?" I indifferently asked, as I watched her feed the serpent.

"Yes!" she cried, as if astonished. "How did you know? It is the food of all foods, the dainty morsel for the cobra."

She put one or two pieces in the reptile's cage, and it devoured them with avidity.

"Now that you have supper, my pet, we will do likewise," she gayly cried, as she closed the cage. "Come then, one and all, I am famished."

We followed her to the supper-room, where a delicious luncheon was prepared. She drank but little, though she smoked incessantly.

She grew more audacious as the evening wore on, and, much to my uneasiness, her glittering eyes expressed her bold admiration of me.

Hamilton and Fortune were secretly enjoying my embarrassment, and as for Osgood, he was drinking too heavily to notice what was going on.

I drew a long breath of relief as we left the heated, perfumed air of her apartment. It was good to feel the night breeze upon my flushed face and to see the cold, white stars sparkling far above us.

I listened patiently to the chaffing of my companions as we walked with Hamilton to his office. After bidding him good night, I strolled slowly along with Fortune to his rooms. He asked me to go in for a final cigar. I entered, and, sitting there, told him of my errand in San Francisco.

CHAPTER XII.

He listened to my story with unbounded amazement.

"It seems incredible," he said, as I finished. "It is like some East Indian tale. I doubt not your present theory is the correct one. But how to trap this woman and extort a confession from her is quite another question. From what I have seen this evening, I should judge that you can handle her better than a detective. The creature was not at all shy of you. If I were you I should go to see her alone, and let developments decide your course. I think often the accident of an hour will give us the results which the careful plans of days cannot accomplish. I know Osgood and his ways well, and I will find out when he is likely to be away from his rooms. You can go there with a confession all prepared for her to sign. Who knows? you may catch your bird at once."

I determined to follow his advice, and the result justified its sagacity.

Within a week Fortune informed me that on a certain night Osgood was to attend a ball, which would leave his mistress quite alone.

I immediately sent a note to Bojanta, asking if she would receive me that evening. The messenger brought me an answer in an envelope whose seal bore an effigy of a coiled serpent with uplifted head and forked tongue. I hurriedly broke it open. Bojanta would be charmed to see me.

My plans were soon made. Fortune and a detective were to await me in a drug store about a block from the snake-charmer's apartment, whence I could easily summon them if necessary.

I could not quite determine upon my course toward Bojanta, but finally decided to trust fate to teach me the way to master her.

Little did I dream what lay before me as I knocked softly at her door at the appointed hour. I knew full well that I was about to play a desperate game with a woman as cunning as one of her own serpents, but I underestimated her craft and depravity.

(To be continued.)

BIRTHDAY FOR EACH SEX.

Every Japanese Boy Is Supposed to Be Born on March 3.

With the exception of the emperor there are no individual birthdays in delightfully interesting Japan. The people, however, make up for this neglect by having a sort of general birthday of everybody in common, which is celebrated with great rejoicing.

There are two of these general holidays, one for each sex. The male birthday, which is known as the "celebration of the boys," occurs on the third day of the third month and the fifth day of the fifth month. These days are generally put aside and boys and girls respectively receive presents according to their station.

The birthday of the emperor, or Ten-o, as he is more properly styled, is also a general holiday for the Japanese everywhere. The houses are all decorated with flags, and in the evening the streets are gay with the lights of innumerable colored lanterns. In the morning the highest authorities go to the palace and offer their congratulations in person and the lower degrees offer them vicariously to their superiors. All the Japanese would, somehow or other, congratulate their monarch on having another year to his age.

Hydrophobia Germs.

Dr. A. Negri, at Pavi, announced last March the discovery of the specific micro-organism of hydrophobia. He now states that he has examined more than 100 dogs with natural or laboratory hydrophobia, and has never failed to find the specific micro-organism in the nerve centers. On the other hand, he has never found it in other dogs.



"What brings you here?"

he sneered, "you are the immaculate citizen—the man without a past! What have you to do with such an one as I?" There was a bitter sarcasm in his tone, a morbid jealousy in his look, Mr. Burritt refused to recognize the presence of either.

"But you will return with me, will you not?" he said, "you will let me introduce you to them and make their acquaintance? Take us on your way, and spend at least one night under my roof."

"You are very good, Silas," said his friend. "Ah, if they were all like you—but you forget there are others who—"

Mr. Burritt interrupted him. "I know what you are going to say and will relieve your mind at once. Of all those—and they were not many, six at the outside—who were intimately acquainted with your past history and," he hesitated a moment, "and that unhappy affair, not one is living besides myself."

"What!" cried the other man, in great excitement, "all dead?"

"All but myself," was the answer. "Thank God for that!" burst from the other's lips. "Will you swear that this is so—that they are indeed all dead who are connected with the past, except yourself?"

Mr. Burritt bent his head in reply. The strain of the interview was beginning to tell upon him, together with the hurried journey, and he felt the need of repose.

"Believe me, Jim," he said, falling back again into the old familiar style of address, "you have nothing to fear. Your secret is safe enough with me—never doubt it." He spoke kindly, even affectionately, but his fatigue was evident, and his friend could not but observe it.

"Silas," he said, "you are worn out. We will continue the subject some other time."

They turned to leave the room together. Mr. Burritt passed out first; his companion lingered behind him. As he did so, his brief assumption of cheerfulness fell from him; his face changed and darkened, and the whole expression altered.

"All dead but one," he whispered to himself—"and that one—" The sentence was left unfinished.

CHAPTER III.

Midnight Reflections.

Mr. Burritt passed a very restless night. Perhaps his dinner had disagreed with him. More probably it was the result of the agitation and

To fear! Could it be possible that his old friend believed that he had cause to fear him? But what had been his own words on the subject?

"You can ruin me, Silas, in the eyes of my child, as well as in those of the world, whenever you please!"

The question was, had he, at the time, really meant what he said? Had he, for an instant, believed him capable of such baseness as this?

If so—good heavens. It was a dreadful thought—would he not have still greater reason to exclaim, "Thank God!" when he heard of his death?

He scarcely dared to breathe it to himself, but the idea, having once occurred, clung to him, and refused to be set aside, but returned again and again in spite of his steadfastly rejecting it as unworthy and dishonorable. At the same time he found himself wondering whether his friend, the object of these painful thoughts, who occupied an adjoining room, was also lying awake and indulging in unprofitable reflections. Or perhaps he was more pleasantly employed in thinking of his daughter; anticipating their meeting and picturing her as she would be after five years' separation. Whatever else he might, or might not be, he was evidently an affectionate parent, devoted to this one child.

Mr. Burritt was getting sleepy at last. No doubt it was something which he had eaten at dinner that had upset his digestion and filled his mind with all these morbid fancies. There was nothing like indignation for making one see everything in a bad light.

Then he slept, and as he slept he dreamed a dream. He thought he was lying on the edge of a precipice—a precipice which went sheer down many hundreds of feet. But although he occupied such a dangerous position he felt no uneasiness at first, only a little gentle surprise as to what he was doing there, and a little wonder as to what was going to happen.

Then a hand came up and out of the abyss and grasped him, drawing him nearer and nearer to the giddy verge of the precipice, and he felt himself dragged slowly but surely to destruction. In vain he clutched at the grass and stones and projections of the cliff; he was still drawn on, until, at last, he was poised upon the very edge and could look down into the depths of the chasm beneath. For a few seconds—during which he seemed to experience a lifetime of agony—he remained in that awful position. Then